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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 001384

SIPDIS

LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PARTIES DEMAND TRANSPARENCY FOR 2005  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Classified By: Pol/Econ Erinn C. Reed for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (U) Summary: Recent developments in opposition party politics have led to the release of demands to the Government of Djibouti for transparency in the upcoming presidential election. Reiterating many of the points stated in their unanswered letter to the Government 21 May 2004, the four leaders of the opposition coalition parties released a joint press statement demanding certain measures to ensure transparency in the election. Among the demands are a reformation and publication of electoral lists to ensure that they reflect the actual population, establishment of a National Independent Electoral Commission composed to impartial voters, and equal access to public media during the campaign. End Summary.

2. (U) The opposition coalition, Democratic Union for Alternance (UAD), published a joint press released signed by the leaders of the four parties demanding transparency measures be established to ensure a fair, democratic election in the upcoming presidential race, expected to be held April 2005. UAD has repeatedly requested that the Government follow through on promises made in the 1992 constitution and 2001 peace accord between the Government and the Armed faction of Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) - now opposition party Republican Alliance for Democracy. Among these promises are decentralization elections to establish regional councils which have greater autonomy for each district, the creation of a special statute regarding Djibouti City - which has been separated from what is now Arta district, the establishment of a communication law allowing the opening of independent radio and television, as well as the repayment of fees submitted by candidates in the 2003 legislative elections.

3. (U) Along with these promises, the opposition also believes it is necessary to amend certain policies regarding elections. The desired amendments include:

- the overhaul of electoral lists to reflect the true population created by voting bureaus in the district that the list represents,
- publication of the electoral lists,
- the reformation of the National Independent Election Commission (CENI) to include a parity of opposition and government members and a leader which is agreeable to both sides - currently 80 percent of the CENI are government members,
- an amendment to the current election law to state that each party must receive a copy of the announced results as tallied by the CENI,
- abandonment of the appointment of voting station assessors by the political parties in the contest,
- and the free and equal access for all parties to public media such as radio, TV and newspapers.

Without these issues being resolved the opposition does not believe that the elections can be anything but entrenched in massive fraud and incapable of producing a guaranteed honest and credible election.

4. (SBU) In conversation with Souleiman Farah Lodon, vice-president of Movement for Democratic Renewal (MRD), 27 October Poloff learned that the opposition may entertain the notion of boycotting the election if their demands are not met. However, Lodon noted that no decision would be made without the consent of all four parties. He continued that the opposition would use the same method for choosing a single candidate to represent them in the election. Poloff then inquired about the September announcement of Djiboutian Party for Development (PDD) President Mohamed Daoud Chehem's intention to represent his own party in the race for President. Lodon replied that Chehem rescinded his candidacy in a press statement on 18 October. He continued that the three other opposition party leaders had called Chehem to account for breaking agreements of the coalition by making a unilateral decision. Lodon commented that they then asked Chehem whether he would be in the coalition or whether his party would separate. Shortly after, Chehem released a statement indicating, according to Lodon, that he would rescind his candidacy.

5. (U) Chehem's press statement reads as follows: "Following the publication, in several international journals, of the announcement of my candidacy in the presidential election of

2005, I have the honor of informing the other three parties of the Union for Democratic Alternance (UAD) that such a decision will be made only in conformity with the ways and customs of the Coordination, that is to say in a collegial manner. Consequently, I affirm that PDD remains still a party of the UAD. A division within itself will only profit the single party regime that mismanages the country."

16. (C) Comment: Post has yet to verify whether Chehem has indeed withdrawn himself from the running. It is suspicious that Chehem's statement is phrased in such a way that it seems more like a clarification of support for coalition methods than a retraction. The process that Lodon described in which Chehem was told to make a decision between being in the coalition or not appears to have elements of coercion or intimidation to maintain a unified front. The candidacy, or non-candidacy, of Chehem does indicate that within the opposition there is a distinct difference in approach towards the election and a clear lack of coordination. End Comment.  
RAGSDALE